



100 FIRSTs that shaped Bangkok

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Siam's first airport was at Srpathum Palace, the same place Bangkokians had their first glimpse of an aeroplane, an early model shipped here from Europe late in the late Fifth Reign as part of an aviation exhibition. Here too, years later, King Rama VI joined his countrymen to watch a plane actually fly.

In 1910, Rama VI ordered an airfield built to handle a growth spurt in air travel. His administrators purchased land in Don E Yeow - in what is now called Don Muang district - for the international airport. The facility, with runways and an aircraft dock, was finished in 1914.

On March 2 that year, three Siamese pilots - Major Luang Salsilapawut,

Captain Luang Awut and Lieutenant Dhip Ketkattimas - made the inaugural landing there, having flown 22 kilometres from Srpathum Palace on what is now Vibhavadi-Rangsit Road in 13 minutes.

The field served from the start as the Royal Thai Air Force base and was already known as Bangkok International Airport, though it was commonly referred to as Don Muang International Airport.

In 1983, the Airports Council International ranked Don Muang 51st among the largest airports in the world, accommodating 5.68 million passengers a year. By 1998 that number had quintupled to 25.62 million, making Don Muang the world's 28th busiest.

In 1991, the airport ranked 23rd in the world in terms of cargo volume: 403,087 tonnes annually. In 1998 it shipped 719,324 tonnes, though its ranking slipped to 24.

A long-term plan initiated by the current government will see Don Muang airport transformed into a huge government complex late next year as jet planes begin using "the Second Bangkok International Airport" just east of the capital. Like Don Muang, the airport will be known for its locale, Suvarnabhumi.

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The Nation

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